

GET READY THE WREATHS¹

By FANNIE HURST

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WHERE St. Louis begins to peter out into brick- and limestone-kilns and great scars of unworked and overworked quarries, the first and more unpretentious of its suburbs take up — Benson, Maplehurst, and Ridgeway Heights intervening with one-story brick cottages and two-story packing-cases — between the smoke of the city and the carefully parked Queen Anne quietude of Glenwood and Croton Grove.

Over Benson hangs a white haze of limestone, gritty with train and foundry smoke. At night, the lime-kilns, spotted with white deposits, burn redly, showing through their open doors like great, inflamed diphtheretic throats, tongues of flame bursting and licking out.

Winchester Road, which runs out from the heart of the city to string these towns together, is paved with brick, and its traffic, for the most part, is the great tinted dump-carts of the quarries and steel interurban electric cars, which hum so heavily that even the windows of outlying cottages titillate.

For blocks, from Benson to Maplehurst and from Maplehurst to Ridgeway Heights, Winchester Road repeats itself in terms of the butcher, the baker, the corner saloon. A feed store. A monument- and stone-cutter. A confectioner. A general-merchandise store, with a glass case of men's collars outside the entrance. The butcher, the baker, the corner saloon.

At Benson, where this highway cuts through, the city,

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wreathed in smoke, and a great oceanic stretch of roofs are in easy view, and at closer range, an outlying section of public asylums for the city's discard of its debility and its senility.

Jutting a story above the one-storied march of Winchester Road, The Convenience Merchandise Corner, Benson, overlooks, from the southeast up-stairs window, a remote view of the City Hospital, the Ferris wheel of an amusement-park, and on clear days, the oceanic waves of roof. Below, within the store, that view is entirely obliterated by a brace of shelves built across the corresponding window and brilliantly stacked with ribbons of a score of colors and as many widths. A considerable flow of daylight thus diverted, The Convenience Merchandise Corner, even of early afternoon, fades out into half-discernible corners; a rear-wall display of overalls and striped denim coats crowded back into indefinitude, the haberdashery counter, with a giant gilt shirt-stud suspended above, hardly more outstanding.

Even the notions and dry-goods, flanking the right wall in stacks and bolts, merge into blur, the outline of a white-sateen and corseted woman's torso surmounting the top-most of the shelves with bold curvature.

With spring sunshine even hot against the steel rails of Winchester Road, and awnings drawn against its inroads into the window display, Mrs. Shila Coblenz, routing gloom, reached up tiptoe across the haberdashery counter for the suspended chain of a cluster of bulbs, the red of exertion rising up the taut line of throat and lifted chin.

"A little light on the subject, Milt."

"Let me, Mrs. C."

Facing her from the outer side of the counter, Mr. Milton Bauer stretched also, his well-pressed, pin-checked coat crawling up.

All things swam out into the glow. The great suspended stud; the background of shelves and boxes; the scissors-like overalls against the wall; a clothes-line of children's factory-made print frocks; a center-bin of

women's untrimmed hats; a headless dummy beside the door, enveloped in a long-sleeved gingham apron.

Beneath the dome of the wooden stud, Mrs. Shila Coblenz, of not too fulsome but the hour-glass proportions of two decades ago, smiled, her black eyes, ever so quick to dart, receding slightly as the cheeks lifted.

"Two twenty-five, Milt, for those ribbed assorted sizes and reenforced heels. Leave or take. Bergdorff & Sloan will quote me the whole mill at that price."

With his chest across the counter and legs out violently behind, Mr. Bauer flung up a glance from his order-pad.

"Have a heart, Mrs. C. I'm getting two forty for that stocking from every house in town. The factory can't turn out the orders fast enough at that price. An up-to-date woman like you mustn't make a noise like before the war."

"Leave or take."

"You could shave an egg," he said.

"And rush up those printed lawns. There was two in this morning, sniffing around for spring dimities."

"Any cotton goods? Next month this time, you'll be paying an advance of four cents on percales."

"Stocked."

"Can't tempt you with them wash silks, Mrs. C.? Neatest little article on the market to-day."

"No demand. They finger it up, and then buy the cotton stuffs. Every time I forget my trade hacks rock instead of clips bonds for its spending-money, I get stung."

"This here wash silk, Mrs. C., would —"

"Send me up a dress-pattern off this coral-pink sample for Selene."

"This here dark mulberry, Mrs. C., would suit you something immense."

"That'll be about all."

He flopped shut his book, snapping a rubber band about it and inserting it in an inner coat pocket.

"You ought to stick to them dark, winy shades,

Mrs. C. With your coloring and black hair and eyes, they bring you out like a Gipsy. Never seen you look better than at the Y. M. H. A. entertainment."

Quick color flowed down her open throat and into her shirtwaist. It was as if the platitude merged with the very corpuscles of a blush that sank down into thirsty soil.

"You boys," she said, "come out here and throw in a jolly with every bill of goods. I'll take a good fat discount instead."

"Fact. Never seen you look better. When you got out on the floor in that stamp-your-foot kind of dance with old man Shulof, your hand on your hip and your head jerking it up, there wasn't a girl on the floor, your own daughter included, could touch you, and I'm giving it to you straight."

"That old thing! It's a Russian folk-dance my mother taught me the first year we were in this country. I was three years old then, and, when she got just crazy with homesickness, we used to dance it to each other evenings on the kitchen floor."

"Say, have you heard the news?"

"No."

"Guess."

"Can't."

"Hammerstein is bringing over the crowned heads of Europe for vaudeville."

Mrs. Coblenz moved back a step, her mouth falling open.

"Why — Milton Bauer — in the old country a man could be strung up for saying less than that!"

"That didn't get across. Try another. A Frenchman and his wife were traveling in Russia, and —"

"If — if you had an old mother like mine upstairs, Milton, eating out her heart and her days and her weeks and her months over a husband's grave somewhere in Siberia and a son's grave somewhere in Kishinef, you wouldn't see the joke, neither."

Mr. Bauer executed a self-administered pat sharply against the back of his hand.

"Keeper," he said, "put me in the brain-ward. I — I'm sorry, Mrs. C., so help me! Didn't mean to. How is your mother, Mrs. C.? Seems to me, at the dance the other night, Selene said she was fine and dandy."

"Selene ain't the best judge of her poor old grandmother. It's hard for a young girl to have patience for old age sitting and chewing all day over the past. It's right pitiful the way her grandmother knows it, too, and makes herself talk English all the time to please the child and tries to perk up for her. Selene, thank God, ain't suffered, and can't sympathize!"

"What's ailing her, Mrs. C.? I kinda miss seeing the old lady sitting down here in the store."

"It's the last year or so, Milt. Just like all of a sudden, a woman as active as mamma always was, her health and — her mind kind of went off with a pop."

"Thu! Thu!"

✓ "Doctor says with care she can live for years, but — but it seems terrible the way her — poor mind keeps skipping back. Past all these thirty years in America to — even weeks before I was born. The night they — took my father off to Siberia, with his bare feet in the snow — for distributing papers they found on him — papers that used the word '*svoboda*' — 'freedom.' And the time, ten years later — they shot down my brother right in front of her for — the same reason. She keeps living it over — living it over till I — could die."

"Say, ain't that just a shame, though!"

"Living it, and living it, and living it! The night with me, a heavy three-year-old, in her arms that she got us to the border, dragging a pack of linens with her! The night my father's feet were bleeding in the snow, when they took him! How with me a kid in the crib, my — my brother's face was crushed in — with a heel and a spur — all night, sometimes, she cries in her sleep — begging to go back to find the graves. All day she sits mak-

ing raffia wreaths to take back — making wreaths — making wreaths!”

“Say, ain’t that tough!”

“It’s a godsend she’s got the eyes to do it. It’s wonderful the way she reads — in English, too. There ain’t a daily she misses. Without them and the wreaths — I dunno — I just dunno. Is — is it any wonder, Milt, I — I can’t see the joke?”

“My God, no!”

“I’ll get her back, though.”

“Why, you — she can’t get back there, Mrs. C.”

“There’s a way. Nobody can tell me there’s not. Before the war — before she got like this, seven hundred dollars would have done it for both of us — and it will again, after the war. She’s got the bank-book, and every week that I can squeeze out above expenses, she sees the entry for herself. I’ll get her back. There’s a way lying around somewhere. God knows why she should eat out her heart to go back — but she wants it. God, how she wants it!”

“Poor old dame!”

“You boys guy me with my close-fisted buying these last two years. It’s up to me, Milt, to squeeze this old shebang dry. There’s not much more than a living in it at best, and now with Selene grown up and naturally wanting to have it like other girls, it ain’t always easy to see my way clear. But I’ll do it, if I got to trust the store for a year to a child like Selene. I’ll get her back.”

“You can call on me, Mrs. C., to keep my eye on things while you’re gone.”

“You boys are one crowd of true blues, all right. There ain’t a city salesman comes out here I wouldn’t trust to the limit.”

“You just try me out.”

“Why, just to show you how a woman don’t know how many real friends she has got, why — even Mark Haas, of the Mound City Silk Company, a firm I don’t do two hundred dollars’ worth of business with a year,

I wish you could have heard him the other night, at the Y. M. H. A., a man you know for yourself just comes here to be sociable with the trade."

"Fine fellow, Mark Haas!"

" 'When the time comes, Mrs. Coblenz,' he says, 'that you want to make that trip, just you let me know. Before the war there wasn't a year I didn't cross the water twice, maybe three times, for the firm. I don't know there's much I can do; it ain't so easy to arrange for Russia, but, just the same, you let me know when you're ready to make that trip.' Just like that he said it. That from Mark Haas!"

"And a man like Haas don't talk that way if he don't mean it."

"Mind you, not a hundred dollars a year business with him. I haven't got the demands for silks."

"That wash silk I'm telling you about though, Mrs. C., does up like a —"

"There's ma thumping with the poker on the upstairs floor. When it's closing-time, she begins to get restless. I — I wish Selene would come in. She went out with Lester Goldmark in his little flivver, and I get nervous about automobiles."

Mr. Bauer slid an open-face watch from his waistcoat.

"Good Lord, five-forty, and I've just got time to sell the Maplehurst Emporium a bill of goods!"

"Good-night, Milt; and mind you put up that order of assorted neckwear yourself. Greens in ready-ties are good sellers for this time of the year, and put in some reds and purples for the teamsters."

"No sooner said than done."

"And come out for supper some Sunday night, Milt. It does mamma good to have young people around."

"I'm yours."

"Good-night, Milt."

He reached across the counter, placing his hand over hers.

"Good-night, Mrs. C.," he said, a note lower in his

throat; "and remember, that call-on-me stuff wasn't just conversation."

"Good-night, Milt," said Mrs. Coblenz, a coating of husk over her own voice and sliding her hand out from beneath, to top his. "You — you're all right!"

Upstairs, in a too tufted and too crowded room directly over the frontal half of the store, the window overlooking the remote sea of city was turning taupe, the dusk of early spring, which is faintly tinged with violet, invading. Beside the stove, a base-burner with faint fire showing through its mica, the identity of her figure merged with the fat upholstery of the chair, except where the faint pink through the mica lighted up old flesh, Mrs. Miriam Horowitz, full of years and senile with them, wove with grasses, the écru of her own skin, wreaths that had mounted to a great stack in a bedroom cupboard.

A clock, with a little wheeze and burring attached to each chime, rang six, and upon it, Mrs. Coblenz, breathing from a climb, opened the door.

"Ma, why didn't you rap for Katie to come up and light the gas? You'll ruin your eyes, dearie."

She found out a match, immediately lighting two jets of a center-chandelier, turning them down from singing, drawing the shades of the two front and the southeast windows, stooping over the upholstered chair to imprint a light kiss.

"A fine day, mamma. There'll be an entry this week. Fifty dollars and thirteen cents and another call for garden implements. I think I'll lay in a hardware line after we — we get back. I can use the lower shelf of the china-table, eh, ma?"

Mrs. Horowitz, whose face, the color of old linen in the yellowing, emerged rather startling from the still black hair strained back from it, lay back in her chair, turning her profile against the upholstered back, half a wreath and a trail of raffia sliding to the floor. — It was as

if age had sapped from beneath the skin, so that every curve had collapsed to bagginess, the cheeks and the underchin sagging with too much skin. Even the hands were crinkled like too large gloves, a wide, curiously etched marriage band hanging loosely from the third finger.

Mrs. Coblenz stooped, recovering the wreath.

"Say, mamma, this one is a beauty! That's a new weave, ain't it? Here, work some more, dearie — till Selene comes with your evening papers."

With her profile still to the chair-back, a tear oozed down the corrugated surface of Mrs. Horowitz's cheek. Another.

"Now, mamma! Now, mamma!"

"I got a heaviness — here — inside. I got a heaviness —"

Mrs. Coblenz slid down to her knees beside the chair.

"Now, mamma; shame on my little mamma! Is that the way to act when Shila comes up after a good day? Ain't we got just lots to be thankful for, the business growing and the bank-book growing, and our Selene on top? Shame on mamma!"

~~X~~ "I got a heaviness — here — inside — here."

Mrs. Coblenz reached up for the old hand, patting it.

"It's nothing, mamma — a little nervousness."

"I'm an old woman. I —"

"And just think, Shila's mamma, Mark Haas is going to get us letters and passports and —"

"My son — my boy — his father before him —"

"Mamma — mamma, please don't let a spell come on! It's all right. Shila's going to fix it. Any day now, maybe —"

"You'm a good girl. You'm a good girl, Shila." Tears were coursing down to a mouth that was constantly wry with the taste of them.

"And you're a good mother, mamma. Nobody knows better than me how good."

"You'm a good girl, Shila."

"I was thinking last night, mamma, waiting up for Selene — just thinking how all the good you've done ought to keep your mind off the spells, dearie."

"My son —"

"Why, a woman with as much good to remember as you've got oughtn't to have time for spells. I got to thinking about Coblenz to-day, mamma, how — you never did want him, and when I — I went and did it anyway, and made my mistake, you stood by me to — to the day he died. Never throwing anything up to me! Never nothing but my good little mother, working her hands to the bone after he got us out here to help meet the debts he left us. Ain't that a satisfaction for you to be able to sit and think, mamma, how you helped —"

"His feet — blood from my heart in the snow — blood from my heart!"

"The past is gone, darling. What's the use tearing yourself to pieces with it? Them years in New York, when it was a fight even for bread, and them years here trying to raise Selene and get the business on a footing, you didn't have time to brood then, mamma. That's why, dearie, if only you'll keep yourself busy with something — the wreaths — the —"

"His feet — blood from my —"

"But I'm going to take you back, mamma. To papa's grave. To Aylorff's. But don't eat your heart out until it comes, darling. I'm going to take you back, mamma, with every wreath in the stack; only, you mustn't eat out your heart in spells. You mustn't, mamma; you mustn't."

Sobs rumbled up through Mrs. Horowitz, which her hand to her mouth tried to constrict.

"For his people he died. The papers — I begged he should burn them — he couldn't — I begged he should keep in his hate — he couldn't — in the square he talked it — the soldiers — he died for his people — they got him — the soldiers — his feet in the snow when they took him — the blood in the snow — O my God — my — God!"

"Mamma, darling, please don't go over it all again. What's the use making yourself sick? Please!"

She was well forward in her chair now, winding her dry hands one over the other with a small rotary motion.

"I was rocking — Shila-baby in my lap — stirring on the fire black lentils for my boy — black lentils — he —"

"Mamma!"

"My boy. Like his father before him. My —"

"Mamma, please! Selene is coming any minute now. You know how she hates it. Don't let yourself think back, mamma. A little will-power, the doctor says, is all you need. Think of to-morrow, mamma; maybe, if you want, you can come down and sit in the store awhile and —"

"I was rocking. O my God, I was rocking, and —"

"Don't get to it — mamma, please! Don't rock yourself that way! You'll get yourself dizzy. Don't, ma; don't!"

"Outside — my boy — the holler — O God, in my ears all my life! My boy — the papers — the swords — Aylorff — Aylorff —"

"Shh-h-h — mamma —"

"It came through his heart out the back — a blade with two sides — out the back when I opened the door — the spur in his face when he fell — Shila — the spur in his face — the beautiful face of my boy — my Aylorff — my husband before him — that died to make free!" And fell back, bathed in the sweat of the terrific hiccougging of sobs.

"Mamma, mamma — my God! What shall we do? These spells! You'll kill yourself, darling. I'm going to take you back, dearie — ain't that enough? I promise. I promise. You mustn't, mamma! These spells — they ain't good for a young girl like Selene to hear. Mamma, ain't you got your own Shila — your own Selene? Ain't that something? Ain't it? Ain't it?"

Large drops of sweat had come out and a state of ex-

haustion that swept completely over, prostrating the huddled form in the chair.

“Bed — my bed!”

With her arms twined about the immediately supporting form of her daughter, her entire weight relaxed, and footsteps that dragged without lift, one after the other, Mrs. Horowitz groped out, one hand feeling in advance, into the gloom of a room adjoining.

“Rest! O my God, rest!”

“Yes, yes, mamma; lean on me.”

“My — bed.”

“Yes, yes, darling.”

“Bed.”

Her voice had died now to a whimper that lay on the room after she had passed out of it.

When Selene Coblenz, with a gust that swept the room, sucking the lace curtains back against the panes, flung open the door upon that chromatic scene, the two jets of gas were singing softly into its silence, and, within the nickel-trimmed base-burner, the pink mica had cooled to gray. Sweeping open that door, she closed it softly, standing for the moment against it, her hand crossed in back and on the knob. It was as if standing there with her head cocked and beneath a shadowy blue sailor-hat, a smile coming out, something within her was playing, sweetly insistent to be heard. Philomela, at the first sound of her nightingale self, must have stood thus, trembling with melody. Opposite her, above the crowded mantelpiece and surmounted by a raffia wreath, the enlarged-crayon gaze of her deceased maternal grandparent, abetted by a horrible device of photography, followed her, his eyes focusing the entire room at a glance. Impervious to that scrutiny, Miss Coblenz moved a tiptoe step or two further into the room, lifting off her hat, staring and smiling through a three-shelved cabinet of knick-knacks at what she saw far beyond. Beneath the two jets, high lights in her hair came out, bronze showing

through the brown waves and the patches of curls brought out over her cheeks.

In her dark-blue dress with the row of silver buttons down what was hip before the hipless age, the chest sufficiently concave and the silhouette a mere stroke of a hard pencil, Miss Selene Coblenz measured up and down to America's Venus de Milo, whose chief curvature is of the spine. Slim-etched, and that slimness enhanced by a conscious kind of collapse beneath the blue-silk girdle that reached up halfway to her throat, hers were those proportions which strong women, eschewing the sweetmeat, would earn by the sweat of the Turkish bath.

When Miss Coblenz caught her eye in the square of mirror above the mantelpiece, her hands flew to her cheeks to feel of their redness. They were soft cheeks, smooth with the pollen of youth, and hands still casing them, she moved another step toward the portière door.

"Mamma!"

Mrs. Coblenz emerged immediately, finger up for silence, kissing her daughter on the little spray of cheek-curles.

"Shh-h-h! Gramaw just had a terrible spell."

She dropped down into the upholstered chair beside the base-burner, the pink and moisture of exertion out in her face, took to fanning herself with the end of a face-towel flung across her arm.

"Poor gramaw!" she said. "Poor gramaw!"

Miss Coblenz sat down on the edge of a slim, home-gilded chair, and took to gathering the blue-silk dress into little plaits at her knee.

"Of course — if you don't want to know where I've been — or anything —"

Mrs. Coblenz jerked herself to the moment.

"Did mamma's girl have a good time? Look at your dress all dusty! You oughtn't to wear you best in that little flivver."

Suddenly Miss Coblenz raised her eyes, her red mouth bunched, her eyes all iris.

"Of course — if you don't want to know — anything."

At that large, brilliant gaze, Mrs. Coblenz leaned forward, quickened.

"Why, Selene!"

"Well, why — why don't you ask me something?"

"Why I — I dunno, honey, did — did you and Lester have a nice ride?"

There hung a slight pause, and then a swift moving and crumpling-up of Miss Coblenz on the floor beside her mother's knee.

"You know — only, you won't ask."

With her hand light upon her daughter's hair, Mrs. Coblenz leaned forward, her bosom rising to faster breathing.

"Why — Selene — I why —"

"We — we were speeding along and — all of a sudden — out of a clear sky — he — he popped. He wants it in June — so we can make it our honeymoon to his new territory out in Oklahoma. He knew he was going to pop, he said, ever since the first night he saw me at the Y. M. H. A. He says to his uncle Mark, the very next day in the store, he says to him, 'Uncle Mark,' he says, 'I've met *the* little girl.' He says he thinks more of my little finger than all of his regular crowd of girls in town put together. He wants to live in one of the built-in-bed flats on Wasserman Avenue, like all the swell young marrieds. He's making twenty-six hundred now, mamma, and if he makes good in the new Oklahoma territory, his uncle Mark is — is going to take care of him better. Ain't it like a dream, mamma — your little Selene all of a sudden in with — the somebodys?"

Immediately tears were already finding staggering procession down Mrs. Coblenz' face, her hovering arms completely encircling the slight figure at her feet.

"My little girl! My little Selene! My all!"

"I'll be marrying into one of the best families in town, ma. A girl who marries a nephew of Mark Haas can

hold up her head with the best of them. There's not a boy in town with a better future than Lester. Like Lester says, everything his uncle Mark touches turns to gold, and he's already touched Lester. One of the best known men on Washington Avenue for his blood-uncle, and on his poor dead father's side related to the Katz & Harberger Harbergers. Was I right, mamma, when I said if you'd only let me stop school, I'd show you? Was I right, momsie?"

"My baby! It's like I can't realize it. So young!"

"He took the measure of my finger, mamma, with a piece of string. A diamond, he says, not too flashy, but neat."

"We have 'em, and we suffer for 'em, and we lose 'em."

"He's going to trade in the flivver for a chummy roadster, and —"

"Oh, darling, it's like I can't bear it!"

At that, Miss Coblenz sat back on her tall wooden heels, mauve spats crinkling.

"Well, you're a merry little future mother-in-law, momsie."

"It ain't that, baby. I'm happy that my girl has got herself up in the world with a fine upright boy like Lester; only — you can't understand, babe, till you've got something of your own flesh and blood that belongs to you, that I — I couldn't feel anything except that a piece of my heart was going if — if it was a king you was marrying."

"Now, momsie, it's not like I was moving a thousand miles away. You can be glad I don't have to go far, to New York or to Cleveland, like Alma Yawitz."

"I am! I am!"

"Uncle — Uncle Mark, I guess, will furnish us up like he did Leon and Irma — only, I don't want mahogany — I want Circassian walnut. He gave them their flat-silver, too, Puritan design, for an engagement present. Think of it, mamma, me having that stuck-up Irma

Sinsheimer for a relation! It always made her sore when I got chums with Amy at school and got my nose in it with the Acme crowd, and — and she'll change her tune now, I guess, me marrying her husband's second cousin."

"Didn't Lester want to — to come in for a while, Selene, to — to see — me?"

Sitting there on her heels, Miss Coblenz looked away, answering with her face in profile.

"Yes; only — I — well if you want to know it, mamma, it's no fun for a girl to bring a boy like Lester up here in — in this crazy room all hung up with gramaw's wreaths and half the time her sitting out there in the dark looking in at us through the door and talking to herself."

"Gramaw's an old —"

"Is — it any wonder I'm down at Amy's half the time. How — do you think a girl feels to have gramaw keep hanging onto that old black wig of hers and not letting me take the crayons or wreaths down off the wall. In Lester's crowd, they don't know — nothing about Revolutionary stuff and — and persecutions. Amy's grandmother don't even talk with an accent, and Lester says his grandmother came from Alsace-Lorraine. That's French. They think only tailors and old-clothes men and —"

"Selene!"

"Well, they do. You — you're all right, mamma, as up to date as any of them, but how do you think a girl feels with gramaw always harping right in front of everybody the — the way granpa was a revolutionist and was — was hustled off barefooted to Siberia like — like a tramp. And the way she was cooking black beans when — my uncle — died. Other girls' grandmothers don't tell everything they know. Alma Yawitz's grandmother wears lorgnettes, and you told me yourself they came from nearly the same part of the Pale as gramaw. But you don't hear them remembering it. Alma Yawitz says she's Alsace-Lorraine on both sides. People don't —"

tell everything they know. Anyway — where a girl's got herself as far as I have."

Through sobs that rocked her, Mrs. Coblenz looked down upon her daughter.

"Your poor old grandmother don't deserve that from you! In her day, she worked her hands to the bone for you. With — the kind of father you had, we — we might have died in the gutter but — for how she helped to keep us out, you ungrateful girl — your poor old grandmother that's suffered so terrible!"

"I know it, mamma, but so have other people suffered."

"She's old, Selene — old."

"I tell you it's the way you indulge her, mamma. I've seen her sitting here as perk as you please, and the minute you come in the room, down goes her head like — like she was dying."

"It's her mind, Selene — that's going. That's why I feel if I could only get her back. She ain't old, gramaw ain't. If I could only get her back where she — could see for herself — the graves — is all she needs. All old people think of — the grave. It's eating her — eating her mind. Mark Haas is going to fix it for me after the war — maybe before — if he can. That's the only way poor gramaw can live — or die — happy, Selene. Now — now that my — my little girl ain't any longer my responsibility, I — I'm going to take her back — my little — girl" — her hand reached out, caressing the smooth head, her face projected forward and the eyes yearning down — "my all."

"It's you will be my responsibility now, ma."

"No! No!"

"The first thing Lester says was a flat on Wasserman and a spare room for mother Coblenz when she wants to come down. Wasn't it sweet for him to put it that way right off, ma. 'Mother Coblenz,' he says."

"He's a good boy, Selene. It'll be a proud day for

me and gramaw. Gramaw mustn't miss none of it. He's a good boy and a fine family."

"That's why, mamma, we—got to—to do it up right."

"Lester knows, child, he's not marrying a rich girl."

"A girl don't have to—be rich to get married right."

"You'll have as good as mamma can afford to give it to her girl."

"It—it would be different if Lester's uncle and all wasn't in the Acme Club crowd, and if I hadn't got in with all that bunch. It's the last expense I'll ever be to you, mamma."

"Oh, baby, don't say that!"

"I—me and Lester—Lester and me were talking, mamma—when the engagement's announced next week—a reception—"

"We can clear out this room, move the bed out of gramaw's room into ours, and serve the ice-cream and cake in—"

"Oh, mamma, I don't mean—that!"

"What?"

"Who ever heard of having a reception *here*! People won't come from town way out to this old—cabbage patch. Even Gertie Wolf with their big house on West Pine Boulevard had her reception at the Walsingham Hotel. You—we—can't expect Mark Haas and all the relations—the Sinsheimers—and—all to come out here. I'd rather not have any."

"But, Selene, everybody knows we ain't millionaires, and that you got in with that crowd through being friends at school with Amy Rosen. All the city salesmen and the boys on Washington Avenue, even Mark Haas himself, that time he was in the store with Lester, knows the way we live. You don't need to be ashamed of your little home, Selene, even if it ain't on West Pine Boulevard."

— "It'll be—your last expense, mamma. The Walsing-

ham, that's where the girl that Lester Goldmark marries is expected to have her reception."

"But, Selene, mamma can't afford nothing like that."

Pink swam up into Miss Coblenz's face, and above the sheer-white collar there was a little beating movement at the throat, as if something were fluttering within.

"I — I'd just as soon not get married as — as not to have it like other girls."

"But, Selene —"

"If I — can't have a trousseau like other girls and the things that go with marrying into a — a family like Lester's — I — then — there's no use. I — I can't! I — wouldn't!"

She was fumbling now for a handkerchief against tears that were imminent.

"Why, baby, a girl couldn't have a finer trousseau than the old linens back yet from Russia that me and gramaw got saved up for our girl — linen that can't be bought these days. Bed-sheets that gramaw herself carried to the border, and —"

"Oh, I know. I knew you'd try to dump that stuff on me. That old worm-eaten stuff in gramaw's chest."

"It's hand-woven, Selene, with —"

"I wouldn't have that yellow old stuff — that old-fashioned junk — if I didn't have any trousseau. If I can't afford monogrammed up-to-date linens, like even Alma Yawitz, and a — a pussy-willow-taffeta reception dress, I wouldn't have any. I wouldn't." Her voice crowded with passion and tears rose to the crest of a sob. "I — I'd die first!"

"Selene, Selene, mamma ain't got the money. If she had it, wouldn't she be willing to take the very last penny to give her girl the kind of a wedding she wants? A trousseau like Alma's cost a thousand dollars if it cost a cent. Her table-napkins alone they say cost thirty-six dollars a dozen, unmonogrammed. A reception at the Walsingham costs two hundred dollars if it costs a cent.

Selene, mamma will make for you every sacrifice she can afford, but she ain't got the money."

"You — have got the money!"

"So help me God, Selene! You know, with the quarries shut down, what business has been. You know how — sometimes even to make ends meet, it is a pinch. You're an ungrateful girl, Selene, to ask what I ain't able to do for you. A child like you that's been indulged, that I ain't even asked ever in her life to help a day down in the store. If I had the money, God knows you should be married in real lace, with the finest trousseau a girl ever had. But I ain't got the money — I ain't got the money."

"You have got the money! The book in gramaw's drawer is seven hundred and forty. I guess I ain't blind. I know a thing or two."

"Why Selene — that's gramaw's — to go back —"

"You mean the bank-book's hers?"

"That's gramaw's to go back — home on. That's the money for me to take gramaw and her wreaths back home on."

"There you go — talking loony."

"Selene!"

"Well, I'd like to know what else you'd call it, kidding yourself along like that."

"You —"

"All right. If you think gramaw, with her life all lived, comes first before me, with all my life to live — all right!"

"Your poor old —"

"It's always been gramaw first in this house, anyway. I couldn't even have company since I'm grown up because the way she's always allowed around. Nobody can say I ain't good to gramaw; Lester say it's beautiful the way I am with her, remembering always to bring the newspapers and all, but just the same I know when right's right and wrong's wrong. If my life ain't more

important than gramaw's, with hers all lived, all right. Go ahead!"

"Selene, Selene, ain't it coming to gramaw, after all her years' hard work helping us that — she should be entitled to go back with her wreaths for the graves? Ain't she entitled to die with that off her poor old mind? You bad, ungrateful girl, you, it's coming to a poor old woman that's suffered as terrible as gramaw that I should find a way to take her back."

"Take her back. Where — to jail? To prison in Siberia herself —"

"There's a way —"

"You know gramaw's too old to take a trip like that. You know in your own heart she won't ever see that day. Even before the war, much less now, there wasn't a chance for her to get passports back there. I don't say it ain't all right to kid her along, but when it comes to — to keeping me out of the — the biggest thing that can happen to a girl — when gramaw wouldn't know the difference if you keep showing her the bank-book — it ain't right. That's what it ain't. It ain't right!"

In the smallest possible compass, Miss Coblenz crouched now upon the floor, head down somewhere in her knees, and her curving back racked with rising sobs.

"Selene — but some day —"

"Some day nothing! — A woman like gramaw can't do much more than go down-town once a year, and then you talk about taking her to Russia! You can't get in there, I — tell you — no way you try to fix it after — the way gramaw — had — to leave. Even before the war, Ray Letsky's father couldn't get back on business. There's nothing for her there even after she gets there. In thirty years do you think you can find those graves? Do you know the size of Siberia? No! But I got to pay — I got to pay for gramaw's nonsense. But I won't. I won't go to Lester, if I can't go right. I —"

"Baby, don't cry so — for God's sake don't cry so!"

"I wish I was dead."

"Sh-h-h — you'll wake gramaw."

"I do!"

"O God, help me to do the right thing!"

"If gramaw could understand, she'd be the first one to tell you the right thing. Anybody would."

"No! No! That little bank-book and its entries are her life — her life."

"She don't need to know, mamma. I'm not asking that. That's the way they always do with old people to keep them satisfied. Just humor 'em. Ain't I the one with life before me — ain't I, mamma?"

"O God, show me the way!"

"If there was a chance, you think I'd be spoiling things for gramaw? But there ain't, mamma — not one."

"I keep hoping if not before, then after the war. With the help of Mark Haas —"

"With the book in her drawer like always, and the entries changed once in a while, she'll never know the difference. I swear to God she'll never know the difference, mamma!"

"Poor gramaw!"

"Mamma, promise me — your little Selene. Promise me?"

"Selene, Selene, can we keep it from her?"

"I swear we can, mamma."

"Poor, poor gramaw!"

"Mamma? Mamma darling?"

"O God, show me the way!"

"Ain't it me that's got life before me? My whole life?"

"Yes — Selene."

"Then, mamma, please — you will — you will — darling?"

"Yes, Selene."

In a large, all-frescoed, seventy-five dollars an evening with lights and cloak-room service ballroom of the Hotel Walsingham, a family hostelry in that family circle of

St. Louis known as its West End, the city holds not a few of its charity-whists and benefit musicales; on a dais which can be carried in for the purpose, morning readings of "Little Moments from Little Plays," and with the introduction of a throne-chair, the monthly lodge-meetings of the Lady Mahadharatas of America. For weddings and receptions, a lane of red carpet leads up to the slight dais; and, lined about the brocade and paneled walls, gilt-and-brocade chairs, with the crest of Walsingham in padded embroidery on the backs. Crystal chandeliers, icicles of dripping light, glow down upon a scene of parquet floor, draped velours, and mirrors wreathed in gilt.

At Miss Selene Coblenz's engagement reception, an event properly festooned with smilax and properly jostled with the elbowing figures of waiters tilting their plates of dark-meat chicken salad, two olives, and a finger-roll in among the crowd, a stringed three-piece orchestra, faintly seen and still more faintly heard, played into the babel.

Light, glitteringly filtered through the glass prisms, flowed down upon the dais; upon Miss Selene Coblenz, in a taffeta that wrapped her flat waist and chest like a calyx and suddenly bloomed into the full inverted petals of a skirt; upon Mr. Lester Goldmark, his long body barely knitted yet to man's estate, and his complexion almost clear, standing omnivorous, omnipotent, omnipresent, his hair so well brushed that it lay like black japanning, a white carnation at his silk lapel, and his smile slightly projected by a rush of very white teeth to the very front. Next in line, Mrs. Coblenz, the red of a fervent moment high in her face, beneath the maroon-net bodice the swell of her bosom fast, and her white-gloved hands constantly at the opening and shutting of a lace-and-spangled fan. Back, and well out of the picture, a potted hydrangea beside the Louis Quinze armchair, her hands in silk mitts laid out along the gold-chair sides, her head quavering in a kind of mild palsy, Mrs. Miriam Horowitz, smiling and quivering her state of bewilderment:

With an unfailing propensity to lay hold of to whomsoever he spake, Mr. Lester Goldmark placed his white-gloved hand upon the white-gloved arm of Mrs. Coblenz.

"Say, mother Coblenz, ain't it about time this little girl of mine was resting her pink-satin double A's? She's been on duty up here from four to seven. No wonder uncle Mark bucked."

Mrs. Coblenz threw her glance out over the crowded room, surging with a wave of plumes and clipped heads like a swaying bucket of water which crowds but does not lap over its sides.

"I guess the crowd is finished coming in by now. You tired, Selene?"

Miss Coblenz turned her glowing glance.

"Tired! This is the swellest engagement-party I ever had."

Mrs. Coblenz shifted her weight from one slipper to the other, her maroon-net skirts lying in a swirl around them.

"Just look at gramaw, too! She holds up her head with the best of them. I wouldn't have had her miss this, not for the world."

"Sure one fine old lady! Ought to have seen her shake my hand, mother Coblenz. I nearly had to holler, 'Ouch!'"

"Mamma, here comes Sara Suss and her mother. Take my arm, Lester honey. People mamma used to know." Miss Coblenz leaned forward beyond the dais with the frail curve of a reed.

"Howdado, Mrs. Suss. . . . Thank you. Thanks. Howdado, Sara. Meet my *fiancé*, Lester Haas Goldmark; Mrs. Suss and Sara Suss, my *fiancé*. . . . That's right; better late than never. There's plenty left. . . . We think he is, Mrs. Suss. Aw, Lester honey, quit! Mamma, here's Mrs. Suss and Sadie."

"Mrs. Suss! Say — if you hadn't come, I was going to lay it up against you. If my new ones can come on a day like this, it's a pity my old friends can't come, too."

"Well, Sadie, it's your turn next, eh? . . . I know better than that. With them pink cheeks and black eyes, I wish I had a dime for every chance." (*Sotto.*) "Do you like it, Mrs. Suss? Pussy-willow taffeta. . . . Say, it ought to be. An estimate dress from Madame Murphy — sixty-five with findings. I'm so mad, Sara, you and your mamma couldn't come to the house that night to see her things. If I say so myself, Mrs. Suss, everybody who seen it says Jacob Sinsheimer's daughter herself didn't have a finer. Maybe not so much, but every stitch, Mrs. Suss, made by the same sisters in the same convent that made hers. . . . Towels! I tell her it's a shame to expose them to the light, much less wipe on them. Ain't it? . . . The goodness looks out from his face. And such a love-pair! Lunatics, I call them. He can't keep his hands off. It ain't nice, I tell him. . . . Me? Come close. I dyed the net myself. Ten cents' worth of maroon color. Don't it warm your heart, Mrs. Suss? This morning, after we got her in Lester's uncle Mark's big automobile, I says to her, I says, 'Mamma, you sure it ain't too much.' Like her old self for a minute, Mrs. Suss, she hit me on the arm. 'Go 'way,' she said, 'on my grandchild's engagement-day anything should be too much? Here, waiter, get these two ladies some salad. Good measure, too. Over there by the window, Mrs. Suss. Help yourselves.'"

"Mamma, sh-h-h, the waiters know what to do."

Mrs. Coblenz turned back, the flush warm to her face.

"Say, for an old friend, I can be my own self."

"Can we break the receiving-line now, Lester honey, and go down with everybody? The Sinsheimers and their crowd over there by themselves, we ought to show we appreciate their coming."

Mr. Goldmark twisted high in his collar, cupping her small bare elbow in his hand.

"That's what I say, lovey; let's break. Come, mother Coblenz, let's step down on high society's corns."

"Lester!"

"You and Selene go down with the crowd, Lester. I want to take gramaw to rest for a while before we go home. The manager says we can have room fifty-six by the elevator for her to rest in."

"Get her some newspapers, ma, and I brought her a wreath down to keep her quiet. It's wrapped in her shawl."

Her skirts delicately lifted, Miss Coblenz stepped down off the dais. With her cloud of gauze scarf enveloping her, she was like a tulle-clouded "Springtime," done in the key of Botticelli.

"Oop-si-lah, lovey-dovey!" said Mr. Goldmark, tilting her elbow for the downward step.

"Oop-si-lay, dovey-lovey!" said Miss Coblenz, relaxing to the support.

Gathering up her plentiful skirts, Mrs. Coblenz stepped off, too, but back toward the secluded chair beside the potted hydrangea. A fine line of pain, like a cord tightening, was binding her head, and she put up two fingers to each temple, pressing down the throb.

"Mrs. Coblenz, see what I got for you!" She turned, smiling. "You don't look like you need salad and green ice-cream. You look like you needed what I wanted — a cup of coffee."

"Aw, Mr. Haas — now where in the world — aw, Mr. Haas!"

With a steaming cup outheld and carefully out of collision with the crowd, Mr. Haas unflapped a napkin with his free hand, inserting his foot in the rung of a chair and dragging it toward her.

"Now," he cried, "sit and watch me take care of you!"

There comes a tide in the affairs of men when the years lap softly, leaving no particular inundations on the celebrated sands of time. Between forty and fifty, that span of years which begin the first slight gradations from the apex of life, the gray hair, upstanding like a thick-bristled brush off Mr. Haas's brow, had not so much as

whitened, or the slight paunchiness enhanced even the moving-over of a button. When Mr. Haas smiled, his mustache, which ended in a slight but not waxed flourish, lifted to reveal a white-and-gold smile of the artistry of careful dentistry, and when, upon occasion, he threw back his head to laugh, the roof of his mouth was his own.

He smiled now, peering through gold-rimmed spectacles attached by a chain to a wire-encircled left ear.

"Sit," he cried, "and let me serve you!"

Standing there with a diffidence which she could not crowd down, Mrs. Coblenz smiled through closed lips that would pull at the corners.

"The idea, Mr. Haas — going to all that trouble!"

"'Trouble,' she says! After two hours hand-shaking in a swallowtail, a man knows what real trouble is!"

She stirred around and around the cup, supping up spoonfuls gratefully.

"I'm sure much obliged. It touches the right spot."

He pressed her down to the chair, seating himself on the low edge of the dais.

"Now you sit right here and rest your bones."

"But my mother, Mr. Haas. Before it's time for the ride home, she must rest in a quiet place."

"My car'll be here and waiting five minutes after I telephone."

"You — sure have been grand, Mr. Haas!"

"I shouldn't be grand yet to my — let's see what relation is it I am to you?"

"Honest, you're a case, Mr. Haas — always making fun!"

"My poor dead sister's son marries your daughter. That makes you my — nothing-in-law."

"Honest, Mr. Haas, if I was around you, I'd get fat laughing."

"I wish you was."

"Selene would have fits. 'Never get fat, mamma,' she says, 'if you don't want ——'"

"I don't mean that."

"What?"

"I mean I wish you was around me."

She struck him then with her fan, but the color rose up into the mound of her carefully piled hair.

"I always say I can see where Lester gets his comical ways. Like his uncle, that boy keeps us all laughing."

"Gad, look at her blush! I know women your age would give fifty dollars a blush to do it that way."

She was looking away again, shoulders heaving to silent laughter, the blush still stinging.

"It's been so — so long, Mr. Haas, since I had compliments made to me — you make me feel so — silly."

"I know it, you nice, fine woman, you, and it's a darn shame!"

"Mr.— Haas!"

"I mean it. I hate to see a fine woman not get her dues. Anyways, when she's the finest woman of them all!"

"I — the woman that lives to see a day like this — her daughter the happiest girl in the world with the finest boy in the world — is getting her dues all right, Mr. Haas."

"She's a fine girl, but she ain't worth her mother's little finger nail."

"Mr.— Haas!"

"No, sir-ee!"

"I must be going now, Mr. Haas — my mother —"

"That's right. The minute a man tries to break the ice with this little lady, it's a freeze-out. Now, what did I say so bad? In business, too. Never seen the like. It's like trying to swat a fly to come down on you at the right minute. But now, with you for a nothing-in-law, I got rights."

"If — you ain't the limit, Mr. Haas!"

"Don't mind saying it, Mrs. C., and, for a bachelor, they tell me I'm not the worst judge in the world, but there's not a woman on the floor stacks up like you do."

"Well — of all things!"

"Mean it."

"My mother, Mr. Haas, she —"

"And if anybody should ask you if I've got you on my mind or not, well I've already got the letters out on that little matter of the passports you spoke to me about. If there's a way to fix that up for you, and leave it to me to find it, I —"

She sprang now, trembling, to her feet, all the red of the moment receding.

"Mr. Haas, I — I must go now. My — mother —"

He took her arm, winding her in and out among crowded-out chairs behind the dais.

"I wish it to every mother to have a daughter like you, Mrs. C."

"No! No!" she said, stumbling rather wildly through the chairs. "No! No! No!"

He forged ahead, clearing her path of them.

Beside the potted hydrangea, well back and yet within an easy view, Mrs. Horowitz, her gilt armchair well cushioned for the occasion, and her black grenadine spread decently about her, looked out upon the scene, her slightly palsied head well forward.

"Mamma, you got enough? You wouldn't have missed it, eh? A crowd of people we can be proud to entertain, not? Come; sit quiet in another room for a while, and then Mr. Haas, with his nice big car, will drive us all home again. You know Mr. Haas, dearie — Lester's uncle that had us drove so careful in his fine big car. You remember, dearie — Lester's uncle?"

Mrs. Horowitz looked up, her old face cracking to smile.

"My grandchild! My grandchild! She'm a fine one. Not? My grandchild! My grandchild!"

"You — mustn't mind, Mr. Haas. That's — the way she's done since — since she's — sick. Keeps repeating —"

"My grandchild! From a good mother and a bad

father comes a good grandchild. My grandchild! She'm a good one. My —"

"Mamma, dearie, Mr. Haas is in a hurry. He's come to help me walk you into a little room to rest before we go home in Mr. Haas's big fine auto. Where you can go and rest, mamma, and read the newspapers. Come."

"My back — *ach* — my back!"

"Yes, yes, mamma; we'll fix it. Up! So — la!"

They raised her by the crook of each arm, gently.

"So! Please, Mr. Haas, the pillows. Shawl. There!"

Around a rear hallway, they were almost immediately into a blank, staring hotel bedroom, fresh towels on the furniture-tops only enhancing its staleness.

"Here we are. Sit her here, Mr. Haas, in this rocker."

They lowered her almost inch by inch, sliding down pillows against the chair-back.

"Now, Shila's little mamma, want to sleep?"

"I got — no rest — no rest."

"You're too excited, honey, that's all."

"No rest."

"Here — here's a brand-new hotel Bible on the table, dearie. Shall Shila read it to you?"

"Aylorff —"

"Now, now, mamma. Now, now; you mustn't! Didn't you promise Shila? Look! See, here's a wreath wrapped in your shawl for Shila's little mamma to work on. Plenty of wreaths for us to take back. Work awhile, dearie, and then we'll get Selene and Lester, and, after all the nice company goes away, we'll go home in the auto."

"I begged he should keep in his hate — his feet in the —"

"I know! The papers. That's what little mamma wants. Mr. Haas, that's what she likes better than anything — the evening papers."

"I'll go down and send 'em right up with a boy, and telephone for the car. The crowd's beginning to pour

out now. Just hold your horses there, Mrs. C., and I'll have those papers up here in a jiffy."

He was already closing the door after him, letting in and shutting out a flare of music.

"See, mamma, nice Mr. Haas is getting us the papers. Nice evening papers for Shila's mamma." She leaned down into the recesses of the black grenadine, withdrawing from one of the pockets a pair of silver-rimmed spectacles, adjusting them with some difficulty to the nodding head. "Shila's — little mamma! Shila's mamma!"

"Aylorff, the littlest wreath for — Aylorff — *Meine Kränzle* —"

"Yes, yes."

"*Mein Mann. Mein Sühn.*"

"Ssh-h-h, dearie!"

"Aylorff — *der klenste Kranz far ihm!*"

"Ssh-h-h, dearie — talk English, like Selene wants. Wait till we get on the ship — the beautiful ship to take us back. Mamma, see out the window! Look! That's the beautiful Forest Park, and this is the fine Hotel Walsingham just across — see out — Selene is going to have a flat on —"

"*Sey hoben gestorben far Freiheit. Sey hoben —*"

"There, that's the papers!"

To a succession of quick knocks, she flew to the door, returning with the folded evening editions under her arm.

"Now," she cried, unfolding and inserting the first of them into the quivering hands, "now, a shawl over my little mamma's knees and we're fixed!"

With a series of rapid movements, she flung open one of the black-cashmere shawls across the bed, folding it back into a triangle. Beside the table, bare except for the formal, unthumbed Bible, Mrs. Horowitz rattled out her paper, her near-sighted eyes traveling back and forth across the page.

Music from the ferned-in orchestra came in drifts, faint, not so faint. From somewhere, then immediately

from everywhere, beyond, below, without, the fast shouts of newsboys mingling.

Suddenly and of her own volition, and with a cry that shot up through the room, rending it like a gash, Mrs. Horowitz, who moved by inches, sprang to her supreme height, her arms, the crooks forced out, flung up.

"My darlings — what died — for it! My darlings what died for it — my darlings — Aylorff — my husband!" There was a wail rose up off her words, like the smoke of incense curling, circling around her. "My darlings what died to make free!"

"Mamma — darling — mamma — Mr. Haas! Help! Mamma! My God!"

"Aylorff — my husband — I paid with my blood to make free — my blood — my son — my — own —" Immovable there, her arms flung up and tears so heavy that they rolled whole from her face down to the black grenadine, she was as sonorous as the tragic meter of an Alexandrian line; she was like Ruth, ancestress of heroes and progenitor of kings. "My boy — my own — they died for it! *Mein Mann! Mein Sühn!*"

On her knees, frantic to press her down once more into the chair, terrified at the rigid immobility of the upright figure, Mrs. Coblenz paused then, too, her clasp falling away, and leaned forward to the open sheet of the newspaper, its black headlines facing her:

RUSSIA FREE

BANS DOWN

100,000 SIBERIAN PRISONERS LIBERATED

In her ears a ringing silence, as if a great steel disk had clattered down into the depths of her consciousness. There on her knees, trembling seized her, and she hugged herself against it, leaning forward to corroborate her gaze.

MOST RIGID AUTOCRACY IN THE WORLD
OVERTHROWN

RUSSIA REJOICES

“Mamma! Mamma! My God, Mamma!”

“Home, Shila; home! My husband who died for it — Aylorff! Home now, quick! My wreaths! My wreaths!”

“O my God, Mamma!”

“Home!”

“Yes — darling — yes —”

“My wreaths!”

“Yes, yes, darling; your wreaths. Let — let me think. Freedom! — O my God, help me to find a way! O my God!”

“My wreaths!”

“Here — darling — here!”

From the floor beside her, the raffia wreath half in the making, Mrs. Coblenz reached up, pressing it flat to the heaving old bosom.

“There, darling, there!”

“I paid with my blood —”

“Yes, yes, mamma; you — paid with your blood. Mamma — sit, please. Sit and — let’s try to think. Take it slow, darling — it’s like we can’t take it in all at once. I — we — sit down, darling. You’ll make yourself terrible sick. Sit down, darling, you — you’re slipping.”

“My wreaths —”

Heavily, the arm at the waist gently sustaining, Mrs. Horowitz sank rather softly down, her eyelids fluttering for the moment. A smile had come out on her face, and, as her head sank back against the rest, the eyes resting at the downward flutter, she gave out a long breath, not taking it in again.

“Mamma! You’re fainting!” She leaned to her, shaking the relaxed figure by the elbows, her face almost touching the tallowlike one with the smile lying so deeply

into it. "Mamma! My God, darling, wake up! I'll take you back. I'll find a way to take you. I'm a bad girl, darling, but I'll find a way to take you. I'll take you if — if I kill for it. I promise before God I'll take you. To-morrow — now — nobody can keep me from taking you. The wreaths, mamma! Get ready the wreaths! Mamma, darling, wake up. Get ready the wreaths! The wreaths!" Shaking at that quiet form, sobs that were full of voice, tearing raw from her throat, she fell to kissing the sunken face, enclosing it, stroking it, holding her streaming gaze closely and burningly against the closed lids. "Mamma, I swear to God I'll take you! Answer me, mamma! The bank-book — you've got it! Why don't you wake up — mamma? Help!"

Upon that scene, the quiet of the room so raucously lacerated, burst Mr. Haas, too breathless for voice.

"Mr. Haas my mother — help — my mother! It's a faint, ain't it? A faint?"

He was beside her at two bounds, feeling of the limp wrists, laying his ear to the grenadine bosom, lifting the reluctant lids, touching the flesh that yielded so to touch.

"It's a faint, ain't it, Mr. Haas? Tell her I'll take her back. Wake her up, Mr. Haas! Tell her I'm a bad girl, but I — I'm going to take her back. Now! Tell her! Tell her, Mr. Haas, I've got the bank-book. Please! Please! O my God!"

He turned to her, his face working to keep down compassion.

"We must get a doctor, little lady."

She threw out an arm.

"No! No! I see! My old mother — my old mother — all her life a nobody — she helped — she gave it to them — my mother — a poor little widow nobody — she bought with her blood that freedom — she —"

"God, I just heard it downstairs — it's the tenth wonder of the world. It's too big to take in. I was afraid —"

"Mamma darling, I tell you, wake up! I'm a bad girl, but I'll take you back. Tell her, Mr. Haas, I'll take her back. Wake up, darling! I swear to God — I'll take you!"

"Mrs. Coblenz, my — poor little lady — your mother don't need you to take her back. She's gone back where — where she wants to be. Look at her face, little lady; can't you see she's gone back?"

"No! No! Let me go. Let me touch her. No! No! Mamma darling!"

"Why, there wasn't a way, little lady, you could have fixed it for that poor — old body. She's beyond any of the poor fixings we could do for her. You never saw her face like that before. Look!"

"The wreaths — the wreaths!"

He picked up the raffia circle, placing it back again against the quiet bosom.

"Poor little lady!" he said. "Shila — that's left for us to do. You and me, Shila — we'll take the wreaths back for her."

"My darling — my darling mother! I'll take them back for you! I'll take them back for you!"

"*We'll* take them back for her — Shila."

"I'll —"

"*We'll* take them back for her — Shila."

"*We'll* take them back for you, mamma. We'll take them back for you, darling!"